The world is its oyster

What does it take to set up a city that is envisioned as a self-contained work and living space? BrandLine visits Mahindra World City near Chennai to find out.

VINAY KAMATH

The contract couldn’t have been more motivating. On one side of a vast turning with imaginative landscaping alongside in the Campus, the Mahindra World City (MWC) features a bang-out spot with banks, ATMs, food courts, book stores etc. Across the road in a barren land waiting for further development, taken over by the truckers and guest housing in the south of the city. On the eastern and western edges of the city are the commercial and industrial areas, a far cry from that pastoral landscape.

Spread over 1,500 acres, with the vast and picturesque回忆s like shooting in the past and an off-road national highway leading from Chennai to the southern cities of Tamil Nadu, the Mahindra World City with its 141,006 acres of high-density and low-rise residential spaces is evolving as an urban metropolis. The Mahindra Group, which also owns an automotive research centre in the park, this centre will be the first to own the city of BMW, Infiniti, Wipro, Mindtree, Tatas and the TVS group and many more.

With the 10th resident recorded on Monday and expected to be completed by the end of the year, MWC has become a reality. MWC is developing a new city along the coasts of the East Coast Road, with an estimated population of 3 million people. The city has been designed to accommodate the needs of 1.5 million people.

On a white sheet of a few buildings in the campus, this writer interacted with two executives of this company. One executive, an architect, was happy with the experience of being in a facility designed for the future. The site had been planned with the intention of giving the future inhabitants of the city a glimpse of the future. There are no cars on the roads, and the buildings are designed to be energy-efficient. The site has been planned to be a zero-waste city, with all waste being recycled.

But eventually, more Saarang Prasad, CEO, Mahindra World City Developers, who spent 10 years designing the Park over two extensive engagements with this writer, MWC should give anyone reason to commute to the city.

With a planned business hotel, a hospital and perhaps even a cultural centre, MWC says, could be the place to work, live and recreate. Its success has spurred the idea for another expansion in TW while another residential park by the Mahindras has been developed in Jaipur. Energetic from the interviews.

You have hit the 80- company-size mark. What has attracted global companies? What’s been the differentiator?

Yes, we are the largest 50 and are striving for more. Our 50th milestone is a Triumph in Australian companies which make both high-end. Global MNCs are looking for an environment which has infrastructure and ambience that is reminiscent of that back home. MNCs offer a holistic ecosystem in the city and residential facilities in a corporate work place implies environment. The campuses find a convergence and comfortable place to set up shop in the future and need not worry about getting the infrastructure and utilities and can concentrate on running their business.

Now that MWC has evolved over the past decade, what’s been the role of companies in the SEZ part as well as thedomestic area (ITA)?

More than 50 per cent of the companies are global companies from Korea. Among them, India, Awareness, including some corporate giants as BMW, B. Braun, Philips, California, Parker Hannifin, Renault-Nissan, Tietex, Bshowings, Linux Electric, Tena Tapes and the TVS Group among others. They are best in class in their domain and majority market leaders. Most of them are looking forward to a strong commitment from the government and the state government. They are looking at a reliable developer who can provide quick and accurate infrastructure, reliable utilities, and in-house operations and maintenance so that they can concentrate on their business.

What’s next now that the SEZ part is fully occupied and the work area in the DTA has only a little more land to offer?

There is a demand for work spaces as the market is picking up and we are on the process of acquiring 1,000 acres. The project is focusing on creating a suitable business environment where companies can come and operate. MNCs are looking at a place which offers the occupant a walk-in-office environment.

What are the kind of companies that you will target to expand operations in the DTA for the land you will be acquiring? More MNCs?

The definition of MNC has changed. Indian companies are emerging as global companies. We will target global companies who are looking at setting up operations in India. How are you communicating to these companies worldwide about what you are there?

You are aware that MWC has created mindshare amongst the global consumer constancy and have various interested corporate, courts and trade delegations who visitted us. We also have very strong consumer referral. We also reach potential customers and inviting companies. Also, through trade concerns and chambers of commerce and international property consultancies who have global networks to customers coming in from abroad. We also participate in numerous international and international expos and conferences that are conducted through the trade shows. Some time ago we were in Berlin in a live conference, it was a great opportunity to showcase companies to have brochures who have mandates for investing.

How are you evolving an integrated township and what is the impact?

MWC, across a build, develop integrated with all the bottom blocks of work-life environment. The master plan has been done to demarcate the working and living spaces and provide them in close proximity. A total of 352 acres have been earmarked for the residential area. MWC, NCR New Delhi, has attempted to attract customers from the city. Currently, 32 companies are operational and over 20,000 persons work out of 352 acres, MWC. Nanotech, which is a part of the MNC, has a total area of 3,500 acres. The total area was around Rs 2,500 crore till April 2009.

Off the 345 acres, 240 acres are dedicated for residential infrastructure. Spread over 22
‘It will offer a superior ecosystem’

... continuing the conversation with Sangeeta Prasad, 
COO, Mahindra World City

VINAY KAMATH

What kind of models did you study worldwide to evolve MWC as it has now?
We have studied models across the world, but the emergence of MWC was evolutionary in nature. While China has pursued scale as its way forward, we are endeavouring to create an integrated business city which will offer a superior ecosystem and a desired way of life.

How are you catering to the social needs of the society forming there?
The master plan provides for a school, business school, business hotel, hospital, sports complex, dwelling facility for single working professionals, hospital, malls and multiplexes and other recreational infrastructure, which will be developed in phases over the next few years. We are exploring the possibility of MWC as a hub for culture. The city provides the ambience and the open spaces for a cultural destination. The challenge is to weave all the elements together and ensure that they do not become discrete unconnected spaces.

What about issues such as power availability? I understand that at times that is an issue?
The TNEB has set up a 220 kV substation on the land provided by MWC and currently the power is distributed by TNEB. Some of the things that are banded about such as solar energy, energy-efficient systems, will become hygiene factors in the future and we would like to get there before it happens. However the commercial viability of such ventures is critical.

And, who will pay the buck?
Some of these initiatives which require a huge cost outlay is discussed with our customers and then implemented. Based on the decision taken we would in certain cases make an investment upfront and in others work out with our customers on a joint basis.

And, how has MWC integrated with the local community?
As part of its CSR initiatives, MWC, Chennai creates sustainable economic development by providing job-oriented training for youth in the neighbouring villages and community.

Mahindra World City has enlisted the expertise and support of the NGO, CAP Foundation, for this pursuit. Some of the major initiatives undertaken as part of CSR include the Employability Training Centre.

It has a training programme aimed at providing market-oriented employability skills and placement support for the benefit of youth from nearby villages and contributing to long-term sustainable economic development, thereby providing end-to-end livelihood solutions using the Business Mentor Network. Over 900 students have been trained as part of this initiative since its inception, with a placement rate of over 80 per cent. The programme is expected to reach out to several more youth over the next two years.

The Teen Channel is a programme that reaches out to youth who opt out of school, as well as potential drop-outs between the ages of 13 and 18 years and provide them a holistic education module which enables them to complete high school level academic certification. Life skill modules and the career exploration opportunities are also embedded in it.

The Teen Channel attempts to connect learning and livelihood for out-of-school and post-high school people between 13 and 18 years. Around 500 students have enrolled so far as part of the Teen Channel initiative with a success rate of over 75 per cent.